



# Educators of inmates: Reflections on a five-day Reading-for-Meaning workshop

**Authors:**

Janet L. Condy<sup>1</sup>   
Heather N. Phillips<sup>1</sup> 

**Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Research,  
Faculty of Education, Cape  
Peninsula University of  
Technology, Cape Town,  
South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Janet Condy,  
condyj@cput.ac.za

**Dates:**

Received: 06 Mar. 2025

Accepted: 13 July 2025

Published: 20 Nov. 2025

**How to cite this article:**

Condy, J.L. & Phillips, H.N.,  
2025, 'Educators of inmates:  
Reflections on a five-day  
Reading-for-Meaning  
workshop', *Reading & Writing*  
16(1), a570. [https://doi.org/  
10.4102/rw.v16i1.570](https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v16i1.570)

**Copyright:**

© 2025. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work  
is licensed under the  
Creative Commons  
Attribution 4.0 International  
(CC BY 4.0) license ([https://  
creativecommons.org/  
licenses/by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)).

**Read online:**

Scan this QR  
code with your  
smart phone or  
mobile device  
to read online.

**Background:** The Department of Correctional Services recognises the urgent need to improve access to rehabilitation programmes, to prepare for successful reintegration into society. Despite many correctional services policy documents stating that every child has a right to education, professional development courses have not been offered to educators of inmates.

**Objectives:** Using Vygotsky's and Bandura's theories we explored the learning experiences of educators of inmates using innovative Reading-for-Meaning literacy pedagogical practices. Our objective was for the educators to challenge the inmates' world views about solving problems, thereby attempting to reduce the recidivism rates in South Africa.

**Method:** This study used an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative approach, and a case study design. Pre- and post-questionnaires were used to collect data from 58 educators of prisoners, of whom 44 educators completed the post-questionnaire.

**Results:** The findings indicated that these educators learned from each other, were challenged to view problems from different perspectives, and developed critical thinking skills. These mind shifts motivated them to adapt the literacy strategies modelling the appropriate processes to suit the needs of the inmates.

**Conclusion:** Professional development courses are imperative for all 21st-century educators working in prisons to improve their pedagogical content and knowledge abilities. These educators reflected on how their self-confidence and self-efficacy had developed after attending this short course.

**Contribution:** If South African prison services are committed to reducing the recidivism rates in prisons, it is imperative to provide professional development courses to keep educators' technical, pedagogical, and content knowledge current.

**Keywords:** critical thinking; higher-order questions; prisoner educators; professional development; qualitative; Reading-for-Meaning; self-efficacy; teaching strategies.

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to reflect on a five-day professional development workshop called Reading-for-Meaning (R4M), attended by educators of inmates in the Western Cape. The purpose of this workshop was to share a variety of critical-thinking strategies with these educators and to see if they could use them in their teaching environment. As set out in *Section 29(1)* of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996)*, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) must ensure that 'everyone has a right (a) to basic education (b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible' (South Africa, National Department of Education 2001). This constitutional imperative for schooling is a right which may not be negated by incarceration (DCS 2019:60). In 2020, the DCS's Revised five-year Strategic Plan 2020–2025 claimed that every 10-year-old person will be able to read for meaning. This is the first time the rights of offenders have been acknowledged, and where they have the right to rehabilitation (DCS 2019). While the government has a right to punish an offence, the offender has an equal right not to be disadvantaged by the experience of punishment. The DCS's three-point philosophy of corrections advocates that: (1) all South Africans can contribute to a just, peaceful and safe South Africa; (2) correction, both self-correction and correction of others, is inherent in good citizenship;

**Note:** The manuscript is a contribution to the topical collection titled 'Literacy learning across contexts: home – play – work', under the expert guidance of guest editor Dr Zelda Barends.

and (3) correction is a societal responsibility to which all actors or institutions of society, including the DCS, should contribute (DCS 2019). The DCS recognises the urgent need to improve implementation and access to rehabilitation programmes, such as increased education and skills training, to prepare for successful reintegration into society. It commits to targeting outcomes and intervention programmes (IPs) that offenders need the most.

The National Development Plan (South Africa, National Planning Commission 2013) focuses on social cohesion and safe communities with the successful reintegration of offenders into society. South Africa's economic growth is dependent on employing young people in the labour force every year, and the 2020 State of the Nation Address realised that urgent, innovative and coordinated solutions were imperative to address this unemployed youth crisis. The DCS works with a variety of stakeholders to empower communities, including police, law enforcement agencies, healthcare officials, sports and recreation clubs, training of correctional officials and inmates, and institutions of traditional leadership. Post-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the DCS realised that it needed to be positioned differently by partnering with tertiary institutions to increase the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into communities and reducing recidivism rates (DCS 2019).

With this in mind, on 08 September 2022, International Literacy Day, the University of Technology's library staff collaborated with the Drakenstein Correctional Service educators to celebrate 'A Correctional Services Literacy and Reading Symposium', where librarians, educators, academics, and rehabilitated inmates shared a variety of effective and efficient literacy programmes available in prisons. It was during this day that it became clear to us that, despite all the stakeholders that the DCS collaborated with, they had never offered their educators professional literacy training. Hence, we offered to host a five-day (30-h) R4M workshop with educators from many of the correctional centres in the Western Cape. After reading many local and international articles on education programmes provided for educators of inmates (Astray-Caneda, Busbee & Fanning 2011; Bhatti 2010; Clark 2016; Creese 2016; Hall 2015; Key & May 2019; Krolak 2019; Lukacova et al. 2018), we realised that there was a gap in the literature especially in the area of providing reading for meaning and critical thinking comprehension strategies to educators of inmates. Hence our research question is: 'What were the reflections of the educators of inmates after a five-day R4M workshop?'

## Theoretical framework

Astray-Caneda et al. (2011) believe that social learning needs to be included in programmes so that inmates can better understand the consequences of their actions, thereby reducing recidivism rates. Despite the DCS (2019) acknowledging that education is the:

engine of social mobility and will increase social justice and democracy [...] to ensure offenders obtain the skills and

knowledge that the country needs to drive its economic and social development. (p. 60)

and reduce the high recidivism rates in South African prisons, we were curious to explore these different cultures, histories, and contexts with educators of inmates. Hence, two social learning frameworks underpinned this study: Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural perspective of learning, and Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy.

Vygotsky's (1978:57) well-known concept of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in his socio-cultural theory refer to learning that occurs as we close the gap between what we know and what we still need to know. As the MKOs in the literacy field, we aimed to create a dynamic interaction between ourselves and the educators to effect the gradual learning of the new strategies that could be used to improve the teaching of reading for meaning for inmates. We created a safe social environment and, through guided instruction and modelling of each of the teaching strategies, intentionally being aware of working within their ZPD, the new strategies were shared. Collaborative learning opportunities were created for this new knowledge to be co-constructed among the participants, shared, and critiqued. During the debriefing sessions, the educators discussed how they independently understood these strategies and whether they were appropriate to use with the inmates in their classrooms.

Within social learning theory, Bandura (1977, 1986) defines self-efficacy as one of the most important elements which allows for judgements of one's own capabilities and belief in one's ability to execute courses of action until the desired performances are attained. As stated by Bandura (1986:186), 'Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act'. Bandura's (1977) theory suggests that people learn from each other by observing, imitating and modelling in a social context. Throughout the intervention, the strategies were modelled and then educators had the opportunity to develop lessons using the various strategies. During this process the presenters served as the MKOs, providing guidance to scaffold the learning (Vygotsky 1978). This augured well for the efficacy expectations of 'performance accomplishment' and 'vicarious experience', where there was substantial exposure to the strategies, modelling of the strategies, and the experience of self-instructed performance using said strategies (Bandura 1977). Bandura (1977:196) argues that 'participant modelling provides additional opportunities for translating behavioural conceptions to appropriate actions and for making corrective refinements toward the perfection of skills'. Bandura (1977) further contends that seeing others perform a skill that generates good results will intensify the need for those seeking efficacy to persist in their efforts to attain success. This creation of personal agency contributes to the beliefs of personal efficacy. If people believe they can produce the desired effects, they build incentives to continue growing.

## Literature review

In this literature review, a few pertinent concepts are debated. Since the focus of this article is teaching R4M comprehension skills to educators who teach in prisons, we needed to first position the complexity of educating prisoners, discuss the value of reading in prisons, outline the promotion of reading in prisons, and report on the educators of prisoners. Finally, we discuss a variety of R4M comprehension skills that formed the basis of our IP.

### Educating prisoners

Warr (2016:23) states, 'It was the joy of learning, of expanding one's parameters beyond the stultification and psychological decortication that typically marks the prison experience'. Enrolling in classes while in prison allows prisoners to participate 'in a discourse that produces them as scholars not inmates, learners instead of threats, people instead of numbers, which may contribute to good prison discipline' (Key & May 2019:15). Placing prisoners in educational environments, with the provision of libraries, enables them to develop positive productive attitudes where their identities as students can be formed, instead of leaning on the negativity related to criminality (Clark 2016). Warr (2016) suggests that the benefits are also viewed to be based on opportunities to create informal, conversational, and critical discourses which would impact the development of prisoners on all levels: personal, emotional and cognitive. This supports Adams' (2021) claim that during classes, students are given:

[T]he opportunity to identify themselves as something other than criminals; they identify as students. They could interact with and be seen by people from the outside as something other than criminals as well. (p. 43)

While education is regarded as an important tool for the rehabilitation process and reduces recidivism rates (Hall 2015), it was found that prisoners are not performing as expected within prison schools. In South Africa, at least 80% of prisoners do not complete Matric, and recidivism rates range between 80% and 90% (Louw & Magoro 2010). Stamp (2020) suggests that one of the reasons for students' low levels of education is the issue of language. Magundayao and Rosario (2019) agree that language becomes an issue, since learners must learn using their second or third language, which results in a breakdown in their learning. Added to this is the current curriculum that, according to Magundayao and Rosario (2019), is not based on the diverse learner needs, which poses a barrier. Warr (2016) states that pedagogical practices used should be innovative and should develop critical thinking skills which, according to Clark (2016), would teach prisoners to challenge their own assumptions and think about solving problems. They should also be equipped with knowledge and skills that will render them employable when they are released, which would steer them away from re-offending.

### Value of reading in prisons

The development of reading skills is imperative since it strengthens cognitive skills and lays the foundation for

academic success. This fundamental skill supports language development by enhancing vocabulary, sentence structure, language patterns, and comprehension skills. In prisons, reading has the potential to transform lives, yet for prisoners, being specifically literate holds the potential for (Krolak 2019):

[S]elf-reflecting on their life; eliminates anxiety, stress and depression; empowers engagement and self-responsibility; increases empathy, communication skills and self-esteem; and expands and broadens their perspectives. (p. 43)

Reading in prison can be used as a powerful tool, creating a calming environment leading to increased productivity, improved knowledge and life skills and social integration opportunities (Opesanwo & Awofeso 2024).

For prisoner learners, developing literacy skills has greater value in the actual engagement in learning than the achievement of the qualifications. Only 50% of prisoner learners achieve the initial levels of literacy which, in South Africa, are Adult Basic Level One and Two, as compared to 85% in the population outside of prison, creating a challenge for prisoners leaving prison regarding employment opportunities (Creese 2016). These low literacy skills and the lack of the development of life skills have been found to directly increase recidivism rates. The South African Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (2017) provided the following statistics as justification: for prisoner learners, the one-year re-offending rate is 34% as opposed to 43% for those who did not participate in education opportunities during their sentences (Skipper 2023).

### Promoting reading in prisons

As part of a much bigger campaign to re-socialise prisoners through the promotion of reading, a new law, constituted in Brazil in 2012, gave prisoners the opportunity to engage in reading with the aim of reducing their sentences. Prisoners were granted 1 day off their sentences for every 12 h block of reading, to a maximum of 48 h remission. The new law aimed to create prospects for re-socialisation, sharing information, developing more critical thinking and guiding them; the prisoners became more independent once they were released (Krolak 2019).

Another reading programme, referred to by Skipper (2023), involves mothers who were incarcerated. The mothers were allowed to read books with and to their children through live video chats. The books were then posted to the children so that they could continue to read along after the reading sessions.

The creation of many prison libraries has been a means to provide a window to the world for prisoners whose physical space is already limited. Prisoners experience autonomy and are encouraged to take responsibility since they are free to choose the books they would like to read (Krolak 2019). He further states that reading initiatives in prisons boost self-esteem and self-awareness. This gives

them the confidence to share what they think and what they feel and respect the perspectives and views of others.

### **Educators of prisoners**

Teaching in correctional institutions is very different to teaching in traditional classrooms. Educators of prisoners perceive themselves as different from traditional educators and often experience feelings of exclusion from other educators teaching in adult education (Bhatti 2010). As educators of prisoners do not receive special training for this job, they depend on their training and experience in traditional teaching and try to adapt it to the prison environment (Patrie 2017). They enter this environment with their experience and pedagogical approaches used to teach learners in mainstream schools, which do not fit in with the prison culture (Lukacova et al. 2018). Educators in prisons have voiced their needs, 'I need new skills to help me teach such a diverse group in such a different place' (Patrie 2017:18). The need, therefore, for professional development of educators of prisoners, is necessary to guide them on how to teach, what to teach and to be able to adapt to the different environment (Lukacova et al. 2018; Patrie 2017).

The DCS has the responsibility to ensure that mechanisms are put in place for teacher professional development. Educators, especially those newly qualified, need to be motivated, nurtured, and stimulated so that they can reach their full potential as educators for purposes of enhancing learning. However, Stamp (2020) states that in her study where she interviewed teachers of prisoners, they acknowledged that they lacked the experience to manage and deliver education in prisons. While professional training was available, very often it did not meet the needs of the educators. They should be given the freedom to create exciting ways that are aligned with the interests, experiences and knowledge of the learners in their classes with the hope of pursuing enjoyable learning experiences for all involved, and advance prisoners' personal growth.

### **Reading-for-Meaning comprehension skills**

Rao et al. (2007) revealed that the assumption that skilled readers use reading strategies is truer for bilingual primary school students. They realised that successful learners exploited deep-level processing strategies such as inference, prediction, and reconstruction, while less successful students used surface-level processing strategies such as paraphrasing, re-reading, and questioning. They also suggested that educators should include deep-level reading strategies into their reading instruction.

### **Strategies to improve comprehension and critical thinking**

Olifant et al. (2020) suggest that when various strategies are used to support learners with the development of comprehension skills, learners are helped to overcome language difficulties. Khalifa, Ahmed and Ismael (2020) agree, and add that the use of the strategies will improve

learners' reading and simultaneously will increase confidence in their reading. The following strategies are discussed further: anticipation guides, my turn, your turn, think aloud, philosophy for children (P4C), and the feature matrix.

The anticipation guide is a strategy used to activate learning by tapping into learners' previous knowledge and challenging their existing world views, perspectives and assumptions. This is done by using a set of statements about a particular topic which learners are expected to evaluate by agreeing or disagreeing with the statements or rendering them true or false (Evans, Kodela & Khan 2022). Defrioka (2017) suggests that anticipation guides set a purpose for reading. This strategy encourages the skill of prediction and critical thinking, creating an awareness of how learner thinking changes, leading to improved comprehension of reading texts.

In the My Turn, Your Turn, and Think Aloud strategies, the facilitators focused on modelling the thinking process during reading. Teachers verbally share their thinking patterns while reading a text. Learners experience educators opening their minds, sharing their thoughts as they read, increasing awareness of comprehension processes (Sönmez & Sulak 2018). Skills developed through these strategies include 'predicting, clarifying, paraphrasing and summarising, making connections inferring and creating questions' (Tiba 2023).

Philosophy for children is a strategy that promotes a learner-centred approach, which encourages critical and creative thinking and improves reasoning and reading for meaning (Ab Wahab, Zulkifli & Abdul Razak 2022). Educators provide a stimulus to get learners to ask philosophical questions, and they further participate in the philosophical enquiry around the question. Lipman (2003) was convinced that through the P4C strategy, learners would learn to 'reflect on their thinking, identify weaknesses and solve problems' thus improving their reading for meaning (Jon 2024:4).

A feature matrix is a type of graphic organiser used to activate learners' background knowledge. Teoh et al. (2014:1) suggest that how learners 'process and handle information' determines their learning. The educator provides informational texts to learners, and they use the matrix to organise the information. They then proceed to process the information in the texts by comparing, finding similarities and differences and in this way become more familiar with texts, allowing for deeper understanding of the information (Fatyela et al. 2021).

### **Research methods and design**

This research article was located within an interpretivist qualitative research paradigm, emphasising the shared construction of meanings. Empirical data were collected, interpreted and examined from the reflections of educators of inmates during this unique opportunity of attending a R4M workshop (Creswell 2015).

## Participants

Fifty-eight educators volunteered to attend this five-day R4M workshop from 13 to 17 March 2023. These educators taught in 16 of the 42 correctional centres in 9 of the 29 management areas of the Western Cape. For ethical reasons, we withhold the names of the correctional centres. The educators taught in a variety of youth centres, medium-security and maximum-security centres, and taught offenders of a variety of ages, including child offenders (less than 18-years-old, making up 2% of the inmates), juvenile offenders (18–20-years-old, making up 2% of the inmates) and adult offenders (over 21-years-old, making up 97.4% of the offender population) (DCS 2019:69). The participants had all received formal teacher training degrees in the Foundation Phase, Intermediate Phase, Senior Phase, and Further Education and Training sectors, yet none of them had experienced teaching in a prison until they accepted these posts.

## Setting

Our five-day workshop was held in the Drakenstein Correctional Centre in Wellington. On 09 December 1988, this prison, formerly known as Victor Vester Prison, became well known, as former President Nelson Mandela was transferred to this low-security farm prison after being in a maximum-security prison on Robben Island. He lived in a private house on the grounds of the prison, which has subsequently been declared a South African National Heritage Site. It was here that he spent his final days campaigning against apartheid. There is a large statue of President Nelson Mandela just outside the gates of this prison. He served another 14 months here until his release on 11 February 1990.

This facility offered us a large hall, where 10 round tables were set out with six chairs around each table. We were offered tea or coffee and a muffin on arrival, mid-morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea or coffee, served by the same two inmates wearing orange uniforms. Unfortunately, that week we experienced load shedding, which Erero (2023) explains as '[...] living without electricity for several hours or days'. Hence, although we arrived at 8:00 each morning, the groups collaboratively wrote and illustrated their own reading books until 10:00.

## Intervention programme

Having familiarised ourselves with the DCS (2019) policy document of the different educational needs of offenders, we intentionally planned the five-day Intermediate Phase workshop to introduce the educators to nine reading comprehension strategies (Anticipation Guides; Philosophy for Children; Think Aloud; My Turn, Your Turn; KWLS – What I know, What I want to learn, What I have learned and What I still want to learn; Feature Matrix; Cloze; Readers Theatre; Every Pupil Response) and three literacy activities: teaching inference, vocabulary activities, and graphic organisers. As hosts, we

drew on these literacy strategies and activities to role model, scaffold, explicitly teach, and facilitate these strategies using PowerPoint presentations, texts, videos, and group discussions, always allowing enough time for practice. We ended our lessons reflecting on our practices.

The DCS (2019) states that prisons should:

empower educators to actively participate in an educator-friendly classroom on topics such as social justice and democracy, providing some skills and knowledge that the inmates may learn from to reduce their recidivism rates. (p. 60)

Hence, our aim was to introduce the nine literacy comprehension strategies and three activities to the educators to agitate their curiosity, to collaboratively learn to interpret and integrate information, and to challenge their prior knowledge. They were encouraged to ask higher-order questions such as predicting, making connections, clarifying, inferring, and summarising information (Evans et al. 2022). Phillips (2023) reported that the benefits of using these strategies is that during reading, educators are encouraged to listen, develop active thinking, and engage in discussions, thereby improving their speaking and writing skills. During this process, educators were exposed to new vocabulary, which we believed would assist them to better understand their worlds and navigate their lives, assisting them in making informed choices.

## Data collection tools

We used a pre- and post-workshop questionnaire as our data collection tool for this small research project. At the start of the five-day IP, we invited all educators to complete a Google Docs form with 11 open-ended questions, where they were asked to quantitatively self-evaluate their level of confidence and ability related to the concepts that would be covered during the IP: (1) indicated they knew nothing of this topic; (2) they knew of this topic, but did not know how to use it; (3) they knew of this topic and had some confidence in their abilities in this area; and finally, (4) they had excellent knowledge and skill in this area and felt confident in sharing it with others. To our surprise, we realised the educators were not familiar with using this online platform, and the internet connection was poor because of load shedding. We printed out hard copies for all the educators to complete, which they did on the second day of the workshop. The advantage of using this open-ended quantitative questionnaire was that the educators could freely express themselves and it was anonymous. The results of the pre-workshop questionnaires indicated that many of the educators had never heard of these strategies/activities and highlighted only 1s. At the end of the programme, they were asked to re-evaluate.

On the last day of the workshop, there was the end-of-project data collection. A similar post-workshop, open-ended quantitative questionnaire, was printed, where they were asked to re-evaluate their reflections on their new knowledge

and confidence of the nine strategies and three activities strategies. Additionally there were four qualitative questions, where they were asked to reflect on their experiences and how the workshop may have changed their pedagogical approaches: the strengths and the challenges of the R4M literacy workshop, how they felt the workshop could be improved, what they thought of the way the workshop was presented, and in what ways this workshop influenced their own teaching. We received 44 completed post-workshop questionnaires, which is a return rate of 75%. The educators circled 3s (I know about this topic and have some confidence in my abilities in this area) and 4s (I have excellent knowledge and skill in this area and feel confident in sharing it with others).

### Data analysis

We began reading and rereading the 44 hand-written post-workshop questionnaires. After using a manual coding system, patterns and some regularities began to emerge from the data, which we categorised into more meaningful units (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004). We further refined the categories into themes, so that we could begin to formulate tentative answers to our research question, 'What were the reflections of the educators of inmates after a five-day Reading-for-Meaning workshop?' (Bertram & Christiansen 2014).

### Ethical considerations

Since this R4M literacy project was part of a larger National Research Foundation funded project, we received ethical approval from our University of Technology's Education Faculty on 28 August 2019, giving us permission to collect data up to December 2023. The ethical clearance number is EFEC 2-8/2019. Early on the first day of the workshop, we explained the purpose of the research project, informing the participants that they could withdraw from the research at any time and that we would anonymise their data by not using their names, thereby protecting their identities. All participants agreed and signed the consent forms.

## Results

### Discussion

Twelve literacy pedagogical strategies and activities to enhance inmates' R4M and critical thinking skills were taught to this group of 58 educators. These educators were given the opportunity to engage with each strategy in collaboration with their colleagues creating a safe and brave space within which to work (Trowell 2024). In attempting to answer our research question, 'What were the reflections of the educators of inmates after the five-day Reading-for-Meaning workshop?', and after inductively and deductively analysing the data, four themes emerged: gaining new knowledge and skills; elevated confidence levels; making mind shifts; and transformed thinking about changed teaching approaches.

### Gaining new knowledge and skills

When asked how this course influenced their teaching, many educators focused on the value of their newly acquired learning, with comments such as:

'I gained new information and knowledge I did not have [...]' (NN, female, educator)

'learnt a lot [...]' (RJ, female, educator)

'these strategies will help to achieve so much more [...]' (JS, male, educator)

'[i]t gave me knowledge of different strategies' (VM, female, educator)

'looking forward to implementing the skills I acquired' (BM, female, educator)

'I have learned different teaching strategies that will enhance free participation of learning in class, creative thinkers of learners and problem solvers' (MN, female, educator)

'I have gained a lot of how to handle a class in different ways' (MC, male, educator)

'[...]strategies that I almost forgot about [...] this course rejuvenated my teaching strategies.' (KN, female, educator)

The above findings indicate that many of the educators felt they acquired new literacy knowledge and skills which they would be able to use in their own teaching practice. This collaborative workshop allowed the educators to work with and learn from their peers through social interaction, which aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory. Guidance provided by the MKOs created a gradual transition from educators not knowing the strategies to them learning how to implement them in practice, closing the ZPD gap to which Vygotsky (1978) alludes. Through modelling, discussions with peers, guidance and feedback from the MKOs during the sessions, educators started building on their efficacy belief, leading to a higher level of success than previously experienced. This is evident in their comments:

'[...] will help me achieve much more' (JS, male, educator)

'[...] look forward to implementing [...]' (BM, female, educator)

'[...] rejuvenated my teaching strategies.' (KN, female, educator)

Educators determined their own 'capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required', which defined their self-efficacy (Bandura 1986:186).

Through literacy development, educators provide opportunities for their learners (inmates) to 'participate, understand and gain control of the social and literacy practices entrenched within their society' (Venketsamy & Sibanda 2021:261). While some educators shared that the strategies were not all completely new to them, many felt that they inspired them to create classrooms using more learner-centred pedagogies, which would encourage their learners (inmates) to think more critically, participate more freely, and become problem solvers. Bandura (1977), however, believes that merely having these new skills is not enough. Educators must have both the conviction that they can succeed under

challenging circumstances, and the belief to execute them effectively. This self-efficacy is at the heart of human functioning.

### Elevated confidence levels

After having acquired this new-found knowledge of R4M teaching strategies during the five-day workshop, teachers felt that their understanding of literacy skills had improved, and this had increased their confidence. This is evident in the following comments:

- 'I am more confident [...]' (JD, female, educator)
- '[...] greater confidence [...]' (VJ, female, educator)
- 'more confident to use these strategies [...]' (DW, male, educator)
- '[...] has created more confidence to approach the learning in a more interesting way' (VJ, female, educator)
- 'Gave me much more confidence and I am eager to be more creative in preparing a lesson [...]' and ' [...] my confidence has been re-installed [...]' (JD, female, educator)
- 'Feel more fully equipped having learnt new strategies [...]' (PN, female, educator)
- 'Helped to develop my confidence and ways to develop my learners.' (VJ, female, educator)

These educators of inmates felt this course provided them with task-specific confidence to teach literacy in an innovative, engaging way, which is a key component of Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, leading to behavioural change.

Within prisons, there will always be power relations in terms of race, gender, and social status, and sometimes the roles of educators and inmates become blurred. It is therefore important for educators to remain confident and to control the space they occupy (O'Brien et al. 2022). Through professional development workshops, educators can effectively increase their self-confidence (Syafrizal 2024). The acquisition of knowledge promotes a higher level of preparedness among teachers, which is strongly linked to increased levels of confidence and self-efficacy. Where there are higher levels of confidence, educators tend to be 'more courageous in taking initiatives, being creative in presenting material, and more prepared to face challenges in managing the classroom' (Syafrizal 2024:150), leading to their belief that they can attain success in various situations (Bandura 1977). Friesen (2022) maintains that educators need to be physically and emotionally prepared, which is especially true in the different spaces of teaching in prisons (Carroll et al. 2020).

### Making mind shifts

Patrie (2017) argues that it is necessary for educators of prisoners to upskill themselves in terms of knowledge and instructional techniques, to ensure that effective practices are delivered within correctional service classrooms. The exposure to the various R4M strategies during the workshop has, according to the educators, changed the way they think

about their own teaching. This is evident in the comments that follow:

- 'My thinking has been shifted on how to conduct my lessons [...]' (MM, female, educator)
- 'I have a new way of thinking now [...]' (NC, male, educator)
- '[...] made me think in different ways [...]' (MG, male, educator)

The data suggest that these educators embraced the changes in how to teach literacy in prisons. The educators found that the reading strategies taught during the IP made them think differently about how to teach and assisted them in adapting their instructional styles specifically for teaching reading to students in a prison environment (Patrie 2017). Klapwijk (2015) suggests that the research has indicated that teacher change is almost certain to occur, however it is complex and continuous. As teacher mindsets change, their practices and approach to their work also change to match their new ways of thinking. Their changing mindset prepared them to think about moving away from traditional pedagogical approaches and content teaching, realising the value of sharing cultural, historical and personal beliefs (Vygotsky 1978).

The educators' 'new ways of thinking' emanated from particular strategies that were introduced. During the workshop, one of the strategies taught was the use of P4C. This strategy focuses on a particular way of thinking, through questioning of personal assumptions and challenging world views. Szifris (2016) asserts this strategy creates the opportunity to investigate the 'big questions' – questions about reason, truth, and life in general. This encourages a discourse of 'exploration via systematic questioning in order to facilitate independent thinking' (Szifris 2016:96). The educators reflected on their participation in the P4C, indicating that they had made mind-shifts in terms of understanding the value of questioning. The following comments were made:

- '[I am] starting to think about how to ask higher order questions [...]' (ML, female, educator)
- 'Empowered me to change some of my teaching techniques [...] ability to ask HOTS [*higher order thinking questions*]' (ZM, female, educator)
- 'the quality of questions determines the quality of learning.' (RS, male, educator)

In the post-workshop questionnaires, educators reflected that through being exposed to all the reading strategies, they had learnt about the value of questioning and how it had impacted their own learning, and they started to learn how to ask appropriate higher-order thinking questions to develop learners as critical thinkers. The value of these critical-thinking skills which resulted from considering higher-order thinking questions does broaden the inmates' minds and creates opportunities for them to examine and contemplate problems and solutions they encounter, determining the quality of learning (Clark 2016). Samelian (2017) states that being exposed to higher-order thinking

and questioning allows teachers to lead the inmates to deeper and increased reading comprehension, and voices the importance of using these questions during reading discussions, challenging inmates to use these questions to provide the necessary scaffolds for improved reading and comprehension (Vygotsky 1978).

### Transformed thinking about changed teaching approaches

With the knowledge that educators of prisoners had not been exposed to any professional development, the trainers ensured that the literacy sessions were as practical as possible and reflected the 21st century classroom. Throughout the course of the workshop, the educators were encouraged to apply the new strategies taught within their peer groups and were expected to develop resources which could be taken back to their classrooms. Their reflections about the experiences they had using the strategies were focused on how these strategies could change the way they thought about teaching reading comprehension. This was evident in the following responses:

'Helps to improve my teaching skills by applying new ways of presenting lessons' (NL, male, educator)

'[...] empowered me to change some of my teaching techniques' (ZM, female, educator)

'*[encouraged]* me to use a learner-centred approach' (NN, female, educator)

'[...] using a different approach of teaching and learning [...]' (TD, female, educator)

'making the class more participatory' and 'my old strategy of teaching has changed.' (PN, female, educator)

This supports Bandura's (1977) social learning theory by suggesting that people who believe they can achieve difficult tasks are more likely to participate longer and try harder in the face of difficulties, building resilience and self-efficacy. During their reflection time teachers had the opportunity to 'rethink their practices, to learn from their experiences' and understand their own teaching style and tend to see the 'patterns of change' after the intervention (Sierra Piedrahita 2018:104). Rissanen et al. (2019:204) allude to the fact that educators with changing mindsets about their teaching are 'more likely to use more desirable instructional strategies' when teaching their students, leading to greater academic success.

## Conclusion

This five-day R4M workshop was a once off face-to-face literacy workshop with educators who were trained in traditional higher education institutions (Patrie 2017), yet who had chosen to teach inmates from Foundation Phase to Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges in a variety of prison centres from minimum-security to maximum-security environments in the Western Cape. They all reported that they never had the opportunity to participate in additional professional development training. However, when this opportunity was offered to them, they chose to attend this course. They hoped they would be able to

positively influence their inmates by developing critical thinking and questioning skills, thereby making a small contribution towards improving the 34% re-offending rate compared to the 43% for those who did not participate in education opportunities during their sentence (Skipper 2023).

During the five days, the discussions, debates and learning that happened were vibrant, spirited and vigorous, where the educators empowered each other using language to share their rich cultural historical knowledge and unique life experiences (Vygotsky 1978). By interacting with each other and the 12 literacy strategies and activities, the participants reflected Bandura's (1977) social learning theory; they were willing to learn and extend their own knowledge, yet also learn from each other, and were able to model the appropriate behaviours and processes. They began to view problems from different perspectives, which changed the way they thought about the teaching of reading and, after thorough examination, were able to consider taking possible actions to solve literacy problems. In addition, with their new-found critical thinking skills, they began to talk about world issues. For these five days, they showed they had the commitment, conviction and resilience to make changes in their classrooms under challenging conditions. This success led to them experiencing high levels of self-efficacy, confidence and motivation (Bandura 1977). Yet, this is not enough (Bandura 1977). Our 58 educators' confidence and self-efficacy had developed; however, sadly, they left reflecting that they have been left to cope on their own in their classrooms.

We would have liked to have followed up by conducting further interviews to explore the challenges and benefits they experienced when transferring these literacy strategies with their inmates.

This study experienced many limitations. Unfortunately, the gentleman who was our access person to this correctional service left with no follow-up person, limiting us to analysing only one set of hard-copy pre- and post-questionnaires. It was also limited to one group of 58 educators who taught in a variety of prison contexts in the Western Cape. One group of educators had to travel long distances every day, which meant they arrived late and missed some sessions. Daily load shedding also limited our teaching time.

We recommend that more of these practical literacy workshops be offered more regularly, to refresh educators' pedagogical and content knowledge. Since there are many adult offenders in our prisons, we recommend hosting more purpose-built, in-house training and professional development for all educators of prisoners to meet the inmates' needs. To prepare inmates for rehabilitation, reintegration and employment opportunities, we recommend that correctional services become more familiar with the current rapid technological changes, integrating and applying learning technologies, keeping them up to date with the fourth industrial revolution. Finally, we recommend that all educators use their time in the classrooms to discuss the big questions, questions about reason, truth, parenthood, and life in general.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the correctional services educators who participated in this small research study, and to the Drakenstein Correctional Services for hosting us and to the librarian at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Wellington Campus, who initiated this project. Thanks, also, to Lauren Walford, for language editing this manuscript.

## Competing interests

The author reported that they received funding from the National Research Foundation, which may be affected by the research reported in the enclosed publication. The author has disclosed those interests fully and has implemented an approved plan for managing any potential conflicts arising from their involvement. The terms of these funding arrangements have been reviewed and approved by Cape Peninsula University of Technology, in accordance with its policy on objectivity in research. The author, J.L.C., serves as an editorial board member of this journal. J.L.C. has no other competing interests to declare.

## Authors' contributions

J.L.C. was involved in the conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing of the original draft, visualisation, project administration, software, validation, data curation, resources, writing, review and editing of the final article, supervision, and funding acquisition. H.N.P. assisted with conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, writing the original draft, visualisation, software, validation, data curation, resources, writing, review and editing of the final article, and supervision. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

## Funding information

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, or publication of this article. This work was supported by the National Research Foundation. The grant number is SRUG190411429569.

## Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

## References

- Ab Wahab, M.K., Zulkifli, H. & Abdul Razak, K., 2022, 'Impact of philosophy for children and its challenges: A systematic review', *Children* 9(11), 1671. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9111671>
- Adams, M.N., 2021, *Identity change strategies: How people exit stigmatized identities*, Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN, viewed 10 September 2024, from <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds>.
- Astray-Caneda, V., Busbee, M. & Fanning, M., 2011, 'Social learning theory and prison work release programs', in M.S. Plakhotnik, S.M. Nielsen & D.M. Pane (eds.), *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual College of Education & GSN Research Conference*, pp. 2–8, Florida International University, Miami, viewed 12 September 2024, from <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/sferc/2011/2011/31/>.
- Bandura, A., 1977, 'Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioural change', *Psychological Review* 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0033-295X.84.2.191>
- Bandura, A., 1986, *Social foundations of thought and action*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Bertram, C. & Christiansen, I., 2014, *Understanding research. An introduction to reading research*, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.
- Bhatti, G., 2010, 'Learning behind bars: Education in prisons', *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26(1), 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.06.020>
- Carroll, P., Briñol, P., Petty, R.E. & Ketcham, J., 2020, 'Feeling prepared increases confidence in any accessible thoughts affecting evaluation unrelated to the original domain of preparation', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 89, 103962. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2020.103962>
- Clark, R., 2016, 'How education transforms: Evidence from the experience of prisoners' education trust on how education supports prisoner journeys', *Prison Service Journal* 225, 3–8, viewed 10 September 2024, from <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/PSJ%20225%2C%20How%20education%20transforms.pdf>.
- Creese, B., 2016, 'An assessment of the English and maths skills levels of prisoners in England', *London Review of Education* 14(3), 13–30. <https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.14.3.02>
- Creswell, J.W., 2015, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods approaches*, Sage, Los Angeles, CA.
- Defrioka, A., 2017, 'Anticipation guide: A strategy of teaching reading comprehension', *Lingua Didaktika: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Pembelajaran Bahasa* 6(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.24036/ld.v6i2.7257>
- Eroo, J.L., 2023, 'Impact of loadshedding in South Africa: A CGE analysis', *Journal of Economics and Political Economy* 10(2), 78–94.
- Evans, D.R., Kodela, J. & Khan, A., 2022, 'Anticipation guides: A tool to highlight knowledge and promote reflection on learning', *PRiMER: Peer-Reviewed Reports in Medical Education Research* 6, 20. <https://doi.org/10.22454/PRiMER.2022.503406>
- Fatyela, V., Condy, J., Meda, L. & Phillips, H., 2021, 'Improving higher-order comprehension skills of Grade 3 learners in a second language at a quintile 2 school, in Cape Town, South Africa', *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 12(1), 312. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v12i1.312>
- Friesen, H.L., 2022, 'We are all human beings', *International Journal for Talent Development and Creativity* 10, 257–265. <https://doi.org/10.7202/109957ar>
- Hall, J., 2015, 'Correctional education and recidivism: Toward a tool for reduction', *Journal of Correctional Education* 66(2), 4–29, viewed 11 September 2024, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318645657\\_Correctional\\_Education\\_and\\_Recidivism\\_Toward\\_a\\_Tool\\_for\\_Reduction](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318645657_Correctional_Education_and_Recidivism_Toward_a_Tool_for_Reduction).
- Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W. & Smit, B., 2004, *Finding your way in qualitative research*, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.
- Jon, H.S., 2024, 'Is the implementation of philosophy for children in primary school beneficial to the moral and civic education in Hong Kong?', *Cogent Education* 11(1), 2313367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2313367>
- Key, A. & May, M.S., 2019, 'When prisoners dare to become scholars: Prison education as resistance', *Review of Communication* 19(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2018.1555644>
- Khalifa, A.A.H.A.S., Ahmed, A.O.A. & Ismael, E.A.A., 2020, 'EFL teachers' beliefs and actual classroom practices of teaching reading strategies', *International Journal of Science, Engineering and Technology Research* 9(4), 53–59.
- Klapwijk, N.M., 2015, 'EMC<sup>2</sup>= comprehension: A reading strategy instruction framework for all teachers', *South African Journal of Education* 35(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.15700/201503062348>
- Krolak, L., 2019, *Books beyond bars. The transformative potential of prison libraries*, UNESCO, Hamburg.
- Lipman, M., 2003, *Thinking in education*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.
- Louw, F.C.M., & Magoro, M., 2010, 'Measuring re-offending in South Africa', *Open Society Foundation for South Africa (OSF-SA) Conference, Recidivism and Reoffending in South Africa*, Sandton Sun Hotel, Johannesburg, South Africa, November 29–30, 2010.
- Lukacova, S., Lukac, M., Lukac, E., Pirohova, I. & Hartmannova, L., 2018, 'Prison education in Slovakia from the teacher's perspective', *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* 5(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.25771/z8dt-cn71>
- Maguddayao, R. & Rosario, O., 2019, 'Code switching of English language teachers and students in an ESL classroom', *Asian EFL Journal* 21(3), 102–122, viewed 09 September 2024, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332222525\\_Code\\_Switching\\_of\\_English\\_Language\\_Teachers\\_and\\_Students\\_in\\_an\\_ESL\\_Classroom](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332222525_Code_Switching_of_English_Language_Teachers_and_Students_in_an_ESL_Classroom).

- O'Brien, K., King, H., Phillips, J., Dalton, K. & Phoenix, 2022, "Education as the practice of freedom?" Prison education and the pandemic', *Educational Review* 74(3), 685–703. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1996335>
- Olifant, T., Cekiso, M., Boakye, N. & Madikiza, N., 2020, 'Investigating reading comprehension strategies used by teachers during English First Additional Language reading instruction', *Journal for Language Teaching* 54(2), 71–93. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jlt.v51i1.4>
- Opesano, O. & Awofeso, O., 2024, 'The pivotal role of prison libraries as an information resource for prisoner rehabilitation: An integrative review of the literature', *International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IIDI)* 8(1), 64–85. <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v8i1.41248>
- Patrie, N., 2017, 'Learning to be a prison educator', *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* 4(1), 17–24. <https://doi.org/10.15845/jper.v4i1.1045>
- Phillips, N., 2023, 'Developing critical thinking in classrooms. Teacher responses to a Reading-for-Meaning workshop', *Reading & Writing* 14(1), a401. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v14i1.401>
- Rao, J., Gu, P.Y., Zhang, L.J. & Hu, G., 2007, 'Reading strategies and approaches to learning of bilingual primary school pupils', *Language Awareness* 16(4), 243–262. <https://doi.org/10.2167/la423.0>
- Rissanen, I., Kuusisto E., Tuominen M. & Tirri K., 2019, 'In search of a growth mindset pedagogy: A case study of one teacher's classroom practices in a Finnish elementary school', *Teaching and Teacher Education* 77, 204–213. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.10.002>
- Samelian, L.A., 2017, 'How higher order questioning and critical thinking affects reading comprehension', School of Education and Leadership Student Capstone theses and dissertations, viewed 20 September 2024, from [https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_all/4345](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/4345).
- Sierra Piedrahita, A.M., 2018, 'Changing teaching practices: The impact of a professional development program on an English language teacher', *Ikala, revista de lenguaje y cultura* 23(1), 101–121. <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.v23n01a08>
- Skipper, Y., 2023, 'My child the hero: How a collaborative writing project changes prisoners' self-concept and family connection', *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 62(4), 233–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509674.2023.2193435>
- Sönmez, Y. & Sulak, S., 2018, 'The effect of the thinking-aloud strategy on the reading comprehension skills of 4th grade primary school students', *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 6(1), 168–172. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2018.060116>
- South Africa, Department of Correctional Services (DCS), 2019, *Revised five-year strategic plan 2020–2025*, Government Printer, Pretoria.
- South Africa, Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2017, *Annual reports 2017–2018*, Government Printer, Pretoria, viewed 12 August 2023, from <https://www.gov.za/documents/annual-reports/department-justice-and-constitutional-development-annual-report-20172018>.
- South Africa, National Department of Education, 2001, *Manifesto on values, education and democracy*, Government Printer, Pretoria.
- South Africa, National Planning Commission, 2013, *National development plan 2030: Our future – Make it work*, Government Printer, Pretoria.
- Stamp, N.M., 2020, 'Educators' perceptions of barriers to learning in a Correctional Centre in the Western Cape region', MEd thesis, University of Western Cape, viewed 12 August 2024, from <https://uwcscholar.uwc.ac.za/bitstreams/d2fa858a-a7df-4cd6-9e78-7ebcf1d40c81/download>.
- Syafrizal, S., 2024, 'The influence of teachers confidence on teaching and learning process in school', *Journal of Language and Education* 2(3), 150–159. <https://doi.org/10.58738/joladu.v2i3.369>
- Szifris, K., 2016, 'Philosophy in prisons: Opening minds and broadening perspectives through philosophical dialogue', *Prison Service Journal* 225, 33–38.
- Teoh, H.C., Abdullah, M.C., Roslan, S. & Mohd Daud, S., 2014, 'Assessing students approaches to learning using a matrix framework in a Malaysian public university', *SpringerPlus* 3(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-3-54>
- Tiba, C., 2023, 'Motivation to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies after a workshop', *Reading & Writing* 14(1), 405. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v14i1.405>
- Trowell, M., 2024, 'The importance of safe, brave and facilitated spaces in student-staff partnerships – Finding a space for compassion', *Pastoral Care in Education* 43(2), 198–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2024.2322534>
- Venketsamy, T.R. & Sibanda, S.D., 2021, 'Exploring strategies teachers use to develop literacy skills among English First Additional Language learners in the foundation phase', *Perspectives in Education* 39(2), 253–266. <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v39.i2.18>
- Vygotsky, L.S., 1978, *Mind in society. The development of higher psychological processes*, transl. M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman (eds.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Warr, J., 2016, *Transformative dialogues (re) privileging the informal in prison education*, viewed 09 August 2024, from [https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Transformative-dialogues-\(re\)privileging-the-in-Warr/34a9d5c4c89e7501cd473bb826660247a3aa85c5](https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Transformative-dialogues-(re)privileging-the-in-Warr/34a9d5c4c89e7501cd473bb826660247a3aa85c5).